

WHEATENHURST RURAL DISTRICT
COUNCIL.

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

Medical Officer of Health.

1906.

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MEDICAL OFFICER'S REPORT, 1906.

Stroud, Glos.,
17th January, 1907.

Gentlemen,—

In this my first Annual Report on your District I have given a short general description of its chief characters, as well as a review of the year's work.

The district has been fairly free from infectious disease and the statistics for the year are satisfactory.

I would invite your special attention to the sections of the report dealing with water supply and drainage, both of which contain matters of great importance to the district.

In conclusion, I would thank you for the confidence you have placed in me by my appointment as Medical Officer of Health for your District, and beg to remain

Your obedient servant,

J. MIDDLETON MARTIN,

Medical Officer of Health.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION.

The Wheatenhurst Rural District is roughly near the centre of the County of Gloucestershire, and is generally speaking triangular in shape with its angles at Brookthorpe on the east, Arlingham on the west, and Frocester on the south. It is contiguous with the Rural Districts of Gloucester on the north, Stroud on the east, and Dursley on the south, and is bounded on the west and

north-west by the Severn, which here makes a large loop round the Arlingham flats.

The greater part of the district is flat and low lying, the level rising over 100ft. above O.D. at but a few points except on the eastern side where it suddenly merges into the steep escarpment of the Cotswold Hills, rising at one point to over 800ft. O.D.

GEOLOGICAL.

The subsoil over nearly the whole of the district is shown on the geological ordnance map as being Lower Lias Clay, with alluvium in the parts of the parishes of Arlingham, Frampton, Fretherne and Longney bordering on the Severn: the parishes of Brookthorpe, Frocester, Harescombe and Haresfield display in their eastern portions the Middle Lias and Upper Lias Clays, Lias Sands and Inferior Oolite where these are exposed in the western escarpment of the Cotswold Hills. Local beds of gravel of various areas are found on the Lias Clays and in other localities there appear to be deposits of alluvium.

OCCUPATIONS.

There is one cloth mill at Eastington and there are extensive gravel pits at Frampton, but with these exceptions the district is almost entirely agricultural. A portion of the inhabitants in Arlingham, Frampton, Fretherne, Longney and Moreton Valence, which border on the Severn, are engaged in occupations connected with the river—watermen, boat builders, etc. There is a tendency for persons from Gloucester to reside in Hardwicke and to go to and fro daily to their work.

AREA, POPULATION, &C.

This is a sparsely populated district extending over 24,383 acres, of which 138 acres are inland water. It contains 13 civil parishes and 14 ecclesiastical parishes, and is co-terminous with the Wheatenhurst Union, which is divided for registration purposes

into two sub-districts—Frampton and Haresfield. The total number of inhabitants in 1891 was 6,853, and decreased to 6,105 in 1901, that is 10.9 per cent. This decrease was general throughout the whole district with the exception of Brookthorpe, where there was a slight increase: the decrease ranged from 0.3 per cent. in Longney to 19.6 per cent. in Arlingham and 21.6 per cent. in Standish. Males were affected by the decrease more than females, the decrease in the former being 12.6 per cent., and the latter 9.1 per cent.

The estimated population for 1906 is 5,745 (see Table A).

The number of inhabited houses decreased from 1,580 to 1,496 between 1891 and 1901: the average number of persons per house in the former year was 4.34, and in 1901 4.08. In six parishes in 1901 the average was under 4.00.

AGE AND SEX DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION.

Compared with England and Wales the Wheatenhurst Rural District contains an excess of persons over 55, and a deficiency of persons aged 5—35: the proportion of females to males is larger than in England and Wales—113.6 females per 100 males, instead of 106.9 per 100 males in the country generally. In comparing the death rate for this district with those for England and Wales and other districts allowance must be made for the unfavourable age distribution of the population. For this purpose I have calculated the factor for correction for the age and sex distribution of the population: this factor is 0.828. Thus, while the recorded death rate in 1905 was 15.7, the corrected rate is 13.0, and it is this latter rate which should be compared with the rate for England and Wales, viz., 15.2.

HOUSING.

Over the greater part of the district the houses are built of brick and roofed with slates or tiled, whilst in the parishes bordering on the Cotswold Hills stone houses roofed

with stone tiles are commonly met with. In some cases the houses are thatched. Generally the houses are in fair condition though attention might well be paid in improving many. It is usual to collect a part of the rain water falling on the roofs in tubs and other receptacles, but the guttering and spouting are often defective and make the houses and foundations damp.

There is generally a fair area of garden round the houses.

No building bye-laws have been adopted in the district, and consequently the only direct control over new houses is in the matter of water supply.

Six new houses were built during 1906: these were three pairs of semi-detached cottages and villa residences, two in Hardwicke and one in Wheatenhurst.

SEWERAGE AND DRAINAGE.

The form of closet general in the district is the "privy vault," i.e., a hole in the ground of varying dimensions—loosely lined with brick or stone: it has many disadvantages, and amongst others the danger of pollution of water supplies by the deposit of excrement below the soil, and should in all cases where possible be replaced by a proper receptacle with dry earth for deodorising, above ground. Water closets are not common: where they have been adopted, they drain to cesspools, roadside ditches, etc. At Alkerton, in Eastington parish, there is a system of sewers, laid down some 30 years ago, leading to a brick tank on Alkerton Farm with an overflow to the ditch below. Most houses, however, have slop drains which often terminate in the nearest ditch, and in this way small watercourses have gradually been converted into what are practically open sewers and in a few instances have had to be acknowledged by the Council as sewers. This is a serious matter for the district, for if the course is pursued it will finally lead to the necessity of costly systems of sewers and

sewage disposal works. The question has arisen on special cases throughout the year, and, to prevent the further pollution by the connection of new houses, the Council decided to apply for Urban Powers for the purposes of Sect. 25 of the Public Health Act 1875: this would give the Council control over the drainage arrangements of new houses. But, it is important that steps should be taken to stop the existing pollution and I would recommend systematic action under Sect. 91 of the Public Health Act 1875.

HOUSE REFUSE.

The collection of house refuse is not undertaken by the Council, and in general it is thrown over garden ground.

WATER SUPPLY.

Most of the water at present in use in the district is obtained from shallow wells, some open, and some covered, with pumps; the eastern side of the district is better supplied, from springs on the side of the Cotswold Hills. In parts of Eastington and for a few houses in Frocester the supply of the Stroud Water Company is available, while at Brookthorpe some 14 houses are supplied from a small reservoir at the junction of the roads to Gloucester and Upton St. Leonards.

On the whole the supply of the district is not satisfactory. The wells are sunk in the beds of gravel and marl which lie on the clay, and many are said to fail in dry weather—some sooner than others: all the wells I have seen are shallow wells, with the water level within a few feet of the surface, and none were properly protected from the inflow of surface waters. In many parts the water when obtained is brackish and unpleasant to the taste: five samples I have examined from Fretherne, Hardwicke and Whitminster contain chlorine (as chloride) to an extent ranging from 8.3 (the lowest of those I have examined) to 48.5 parts per 100,000. Nitrates were present in all 5 samples and generally very excessive quantities of ammonia and

nitrate were found: total solids ranged from 98 to 565 parts per 100,000. This condition of the sub-soil appears to be general in the parishes bordering on the Severn, and is attributable to the tidal waters diffusing through the sub-soil, partly to the nature of the sub-soil, and partly to the methods of refuse and excrement disposal in vogue in the district. Especial difficulty is experienced in providing supplies of water for new houses, for when wells are sunk the water found is unsatisfactory, and certificates for the occupation of four houses during 1906 were granted only on a limited storage of rain water.

In the parishes on the eastern border of the district often most satisfactory supplies are obtained from the springs breaking on the slope of the Cotswold Hills, which are said in many cases to be very fairly constant.

Parts of the parish of Eastington—which is within the limits of the Stroud Water Company—are very badly supplied with water, particularly at Westend and Nupend: 21 of the 63 houses in these two hamlets are dependent on “pond-holes”—mere hollows in the ground fed by surface water running off the adjoining ground. Others use shallow wells in which the water is brackish—more so apparently in dry seasons—and consequently prefer to go to a well at Nupend—some 1,200 yards distant from the farthest house—which has a local reputation of great purity. In this particular case the Council has called upon the Water Company to render their supply available for the inhabitants of Nupend and Westend.

The provision of a satisfactory supply of water—particularly for the parishes in the western part of the district—is a matter which should receive your careful consideration, and it would appear probable that springs could be found on the hill side which would provide an adequate quantity at a sufficient elevation to supply the district by gravitation.

SLAUGHTER HOUSES.

The slaughter houses are on the whole fairly satisfactory, though in individual cases accumulations of offal, etc., which should have been removed shortly after killing, were found. In some cases drain openings were seen in the slaughter houses which should drain to the exterior. The proper inspection of animals killed is scarcely possible in so scattered a rural district.

DAIRIES, ETC.

Twenty-seven dairies were inspected on one or more occasions during the year, many of them doing a large wholesale business: in the latter cases the milk is cooled and sent to London, Barry Dock, Cardiff, Gloucester, Cheltenham and Stroud. With the exception that in many instances drains opened into the dairies and heterogeneous articles were stored in them, these larger dairies were generally in a satisfactory condition, but there was often evidence in the smaller dairies of lack of the extreme care that should be exercised in dealing with so susceptible a food stuff as milk. In one dairy the milk is sterilized in bottles and sent in a motor van to Gloucester.

On two occasions during 1906 the question of the adoption of regulations with respect to dairies, cowsheds and milkshops was under the consideration of the Council on communications from the Local Government Board. I gathered that members of the Council considered regulations unnecessary and nothing was done in the matter: but I would suggest that in view of the importance of the milk industry to this district it is of equal importance that the business should be safeguarded in every way possible, and I would further suggest that you should re-consider the matter. Even in connection with the larger dairies, the cowsheds and yards were not kept in so cleanly a state as they should be.

BAKEHOUSES.

There are only nine bakehouses on the

register, all of which were inspected during 1906: with marked exceptions they were not carefully managed, rubbish dirt and cobwebs being allowed to accumulate indefinitely, especially in the flour lofts. The attention of occupiers was called to these matters, and in some cases at least the defects have been remedied. One trouble occupiers have to contend with is roughness of floor and walls rendering cleaning a matter of some difficulty: movable troughs on wheels and a smooth floor would tend to greater cleanliness.

WORKSHOPS.

The number of workshops on the register is 17, 9 of which are bakehouses, 3 boat repairers, 2 are laundries, and 3 are dress-makers. There are, however, I believe many omissions, and it is to be hoped that during the present year the register will be brought up to date. No lists of outworkers were received during 1906, though I understand 9 persons in this district do home work for Messrs. Holloway Bros.' ready-made clothing factory, Stroud.

SCHOOLS.

Chicken pox was prevalent in parts of the district during the year, and affected the attendance at the Schools, particularly at Saul (March and December) and at Eastington: several cases of scabies were found at Hardwicke School in August.

ANTHRAX.

One outbreak of this disease occurred, a fat heifer dying of anthrax in Haresfield during December: the carcass was cremated and the premises disinfected by the police.

NOTIFIABLE INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

The total number of notifications (10) received during 1906 was lower than in any year since 1901, when 7 cases were notified. The details as to age and sex distribution and the parishes in which the cases occurred are given in Table III.

Scarlet fever which had been more or less

prevalent during previous years caused only two cases during 1906. Two cases of diphtheria occurred, one was early fatal and the other was removed to the Stroud Joint Isolation Hospital.

The Council have made arrangements with the Stroud Joint Hospital Board for the reception of patients from this district at a charge of three guineas a week, and there is also accommodation for cases of infectious disease in a temporary wood and iron building in the workhouse grounds; no provision exists for its administration either in the way of sleeping rooms for nurses or medical attendance on cases.

VITAL STATISTICS.

As already stated the population of the district estimated to the middle of 1906 was 5,745, and it is on this figure that the rates for the year are calculated. I have in Table A given details, as to population, and average birth and death rates for 1906, for the constituent parishes: though rates calculated on such small figures are of little value, I have included the information which will be valuable when numbers for a longer period are available.

BIRTHS.

The number of births registered during 1906 was 135, giving the comparatively high birth rate of 23.5, which is above the average (22.0) of the previous ten years. The corresponding rate in the neighbouring Stroud Union during 1906 was 19.4. The illegitimate births were 2 in number—1.5 per cent. of total births (Brookthorpe 1 and Frampton 1)

DEATHS.

The total deaths registered in the district during 1906 numbered 76: 6 persons belonging to the district died in public institutions beyond the district (4 in the County Asylum and 2 in Gloucester Infirmary), making a total for the year of 82: the annual rate per 1,000 is 14.3. The average of the previous

ten years (without, I understand, including the deaths of residents dying in the above institutions) was 14.6. Corrected for the age and sex distribution of the population the rate for 1906 becomes 11.8: the rate in the neighbouring Rural District of Stroud was 11.7.

INFANTILE MORTALITY.

The number of infants dying under the age of one year was 6, a death rate per 1,000 births of 44, which is the lowest infantile mortality in any year of which I have records, the average for 10 years being 87. There were no deaths of illegitimate children under one year of age.

UNCERTIFIED DEATHS.

The number of deaths which were not certified by a medical practitioner was 11, 13.4 per cent. of total deaths. Inquests were held in 9 cases with verdicts of natural causes in 5, and accidental drowning in the remaining 4. In the two cases in which no inquests were held the ascribed causes of death were (1) m. 70, heart disease; (2) f. 91, natural decay.

